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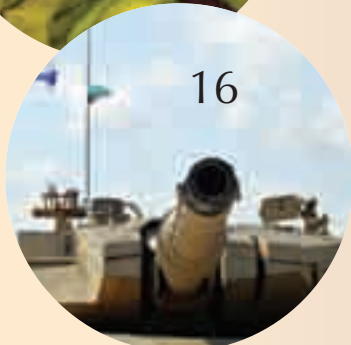
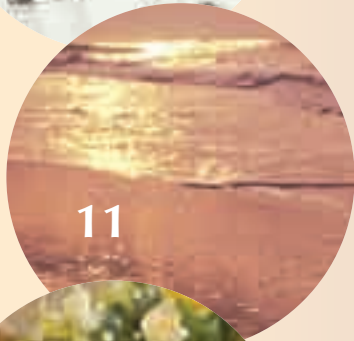
BIBLE ADVOCATE

Apocalypse Ahead

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Miss the last issue on missions? View it and the current issue, plus download the last eight BA's, at www.cog7.org/BA.

Coming in the January-February BA: victory in Christ; hope of Israel; the journey continues . . .

In the December issue of *Now What?*: a young girl's journey to Christ ([http://now what.cog7.org](http://nowwhat.cog7.org))

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Bible Advocate Press

Calvin Burrell: Editor

Sherri Langton: Associate Editor

Keith Michalak: Director of Publications, graphics

Sylvia Corral, Raul González: Translation, proofing

LeRoy and Hope Dais, Linda Michalak: Correspondence, proofing, clerical

Subscriptions and Orders

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Journey's End?



Life is like a journey. It begins the day we are born and reaches its end the day we die. So we wrote here last January. Now it's time to close the book on '07 and complete our quick trip along the Bible's 'Route 66.' At the end of this year, there's 2008. And the journey goes on.

Almost all things come to an end. At the end of birth pangs, there's new life. At the end of one generation, another. At the end of a river, the ocean. At the end of pain and sorrow, relief. At the end of each workday, rest. And the Sabbath mercifully ends each week.

At the end of the Bible, there's a last book. Our first article by Jason Overman (p. 4) puts delightful melody to the mysteries of Revelation. At the end of this age, there's a Second Coming (p. 11) — before new heavens and earth. This BA is planned to pique your interest in these and other prophetic themes (pp. 13-17). Speaking of piquing, don't miss Bill Hicks' analysis of Islam (p. 18).

At the end of life, we've one last breath to take. What happens then is debated by Bible students. Samuele Bacchiocchi's article (p. 9) outlines popular views. His online biblical essay (see note on p. 10) can help dispel some fog from the future we all face. As a Seventh-day Adventist scholar, Dr. B holds a position on personal eschatology that is near what we've long held in Church of God (Seventh Day).

At December's end, the BA moves to another year, with fresh themes planned. Our main subject matter, however, never changes. We're here to advocate the message of grace and truth revealed in God's written and living Word: the Bible and the Lord Jesus. This we will do as far and wide as God gives resources and energy to achieve. Thank you for reading, and thanks for your support!

At the end of death, for the redeemed, there's an awesome grave-break to eternal life. More about that on page 8. At the end of eternal life — there's an oxymoron for sure! He who walks with God not only arrives at a great destination but also finds ever-fresh joy and purpose along the way. This journey never ends.

— Calvin Burrell



*Songs of the
Apocalypse*

Enjoying seven lyrical strains in Revelation. by Jason Overman

The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ does not just signal the end of the Bible; it discloses the very end of time. If the apparent doom it forecasts does not discourage us from further examination, then the bizarre imagery clinches it. The book is formidable, to be sure.

It is peculiar that a volume this obscure should be called Revelation. Despite the avoidance of many, I am drawn to it. It is as incandescent as it is searing, as illuminating as it is disorienting. If we can endure the initial cacophony of its symbolism, we may detect a rhythm to Revelation, that it is as much beginning as end. Like a woman in labor, the melody of travail contains both sorrow and joy — culmination and inauguration. If we are to see the birth of new heavens and new earth, we must first navigate the exertion that is the end of the old. Such a task is not for the faint or comfortable: The songs of the Apocalypse are as fearsome as they are demanding.

The seven tunes that greet us in chapter 1 are simple themes, and they direct much of the cosmic concert we call Revelation.

The blessing

The Apocalypse offers a reward: “Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words

of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near” (1:3). Revelation grants seven blessings to those who risk reading, watching, and obeying (1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14). For all its dread and difficulty, this book above all others bids us to take notice, to hear its strange music, and to embrace its burning message. I can no more refuse it than master it, as the epic proportion and audacious color that is the apocalyptic spectacle compels me to “Come and see” and to “hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” My mind aches in wrapping itself around the images, and I wonder, *Is not the meaning of it as beyond me as is the blessing?*

I take comfort in Jesus’ words to those who asked the meaning of one parable: “Blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear” (Matthew 13:16). The blessing in Revelation commences when we are inquisitive enough to *ask*, to break from all distractions, and, like the novice taking up a new instrument, simply *begin*.

The prophecy

The Apocalypse speaks the lyrical language of dream; our old senses cannot comprehend it. As with the seers Ezekiel and Daniel

before him, what John sees defies rational explanation. To be “in the Spirit” is to be transported out of the prosaic confines of the literal and logical into the startling world of metaphor and mystery (1:10; 4:1; 17:3; 21:10). Seven times in twenty-two chapters (1:3; 11:6; 19:10; 22:7, 10, 18, 19) Revelation describes itself as prophecy. God will “show His servants — things which must shortly take place” (1:1; Amos 3:7).

But the future that John experiences and conveys is not brute history but more poetry. The divine glimpse of reality has urgency and grandeur that conventional discourse cannot contain. Heaven opens, human expression fails, and only inscrutable awe remains. Beauty is indefinable and melody unexplainable; they must be experienced, not translated, to be known.

Revelation is such a melody. It calls us to be a prophetic people, not just farsighted but capable of mediating in the Spirit the melodious beauty of encounter with the divine (1 Corinthians 12:10; 14:1-39; 2 Corinthians 12:1-7).

The sevens

If Genesis is the alpha of time and Scripture, Revelation is the omega — the finale. These two poles — origin and destiny — are

intimately linked. The end is the beginning writ large. Revelation expresses this with the number seven, significant from the Creation. God's seven-day work and rest forever imprint upon seven this idea: *completion of divine project*. In the Apocalypse, seven churches and seven spirits of God (1:4) are arrayed against the seven-headed dragon and beast (chaps. 12–13). The Spirit of God and the old serpent were both active in Eden. Now each is augmented to the ultimate proportion of seven.

Revelation employs this number often as it orchestrates the crowning crescendo — from seven churches (chaps. 1–3) to seven seals (4–7) to seven trumpets (8–11) to seven plagues (15–16), on the way to a “new heaven and a new earth” (21–22). The apocalyptic choir is amplified more and more until a Lamb with seven horns reigns: “It is done!” (5:6; 21:6). This prodigious chant of finality checks our tendency to live futureless lives, to scoff, as some do, that no end is in sight.

The Word

The Apocalypse weaves the fabric of vision from the thread of memory. John states that his prophecy is the “word of God,” a phrase he uses seven times in the book (1:2, 9; 6:9; 17:17; 19:9, 13; 20:4). But this new song is taken from the old (5:9; Psalm 96:1). Hardly a verse in Revelation does not echo the story and style of the Old Testament.

When John writes of the pierced One coming in the clouds (1:7), we hear an echo of Daniel and Zechariah. When he sees the First and Last (v. 17), it is these again plus Exodus, Isaiah, and Ezekiel. The apocalyptic themes are ancient: The dragon wars in Genesis 3:15; Babylon falls in Jeremiah 51:8; kings and priests reign in Exodus 19:6; new heavens and earth are seen in Isaiah 65:17. On a new stage, the script is well worn; the law and prophets have long anticipated this end. Like the living creatures with eyes before and behind (Revelation 4:6; Ezekiel 10:12), Revelation sees what God will do from what He has done. We look forward by looking back, and vision *is* memory.


In God, tomorrow and yesterday are one; the eternal, recurring Word is like its Author, who is and was and is to come (Revelation 1:8; Exodus 3:14).

The testimony

The Apocalypse discloses Christ; its witness is *from* Him and *to* Him. The “testimony of Jesus” is the heartbeat of Revelation (1:2, 9; 12:17; 19:10), the Lamb its central character. Both appear in multiples of seven, fourteen and twenty-eight times each. Like the Word of God, this testimony looks both forward and backward. Jesus is not just He who is coming but also He who first “loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood” (1:5-7). The Christ who comes quickly is never far removed from the Lamb slain (3:11; 5:12). For the New Testament writers, *the end* is always near because Jesus lives and is Lord already. The apocalyptic throng sings the song of the Lamb. They have made His testimony their own, and they bear witness as a living refrain. Christ crucified and coming *has* defeated and *will* defeat dragon and death alike (12:11; 15:3). The “testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” because all God's Word points to the “Lamb . . . slain from the foundation of the world” (19:10; 13:8).

The patience

The Apocalypse sings the praises of endurance, to trust and obey despite circumstances. *Patience* appears seven times in Revelation (1:9; 2:2, 3, 19; 3:10; 13:10; 14:12). The first finds John on Patmos as our “com-



Like the living creatures with eyes before and behind, Revelation sees what God will do from what He has done.

panion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ." Patience rebukes those bewitched by the *now*, for it is a word bound to a future. In the New Testament, this future is conditioned by kingdom expectation. In the context of great persecution and Christ's coming, Jesus says, "By your patience possess your souls" (Luke 21:19). For Paul, tribulation produces patience; by it we persevere, "eagerly waiting for . . . the redemption of our body" (Romans 5:3; 8:22-25). James calls us to "be patient . . . until the coming of the Lord."

Like the prophets who suffered or the farmer who looks for the early and latter rain, we wait patiently and "count them blessed who endure" (James 5:7-11). Revelation's last nod to the ballad of prophetic endurance calls the "patience of the saints" those who "keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus." Resisting the beastly enticements of the immediate, the saints are the real dragon slayers.

The trumpet

The concussion that is the apocalyptic warning pierces the air with a wail: the voice of a trumpet (1:10; 4:1). Its tempo disrupts, its urgency grips; it upends our complacency and demands our attention. The intensity is palatable, the beat bold, as it shows what "must shortly take place," for "the time is near" (1:1-3; 22:6-10). Seven angels with trumpets prepare to sound, "God is coming!" (8:6).

The sound of the trumpet was heard as Israel awaited her encounter with God at Sinai, growing in volume until God



As Revelation concludes, it insists thrice that Jesus is coming quickly. This is the rhythm of the saints; we stand ready.

came down (Exodus 19:13-19). Later the prophets embodied the blast as they gathered, warned, and called Israel to repentance in preparation for God's comings (Isaiah 58:1; Jeremiah 4:5; Ezekiel 33:3; Joel 2:1). Then Jesus predicted the sign of His coming, the end of the world, and "a great sound of a trumpet" (Matthew 24:2, 31) that announces the ultimate return and resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:52; 1 Thessalonians 4:16). As Revelation concludes, it insists thrice that Jesus is coming quickly (22:7, 12, 20). This is the rhythm of the saints; we stand ready. Our reply, no less than John's, is "Even so, come, Lord Jesus!" (22:20).

Masterpiece

The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ is not just the last book of the Bible; it is a way of looking at the whole. The world-shattering, world-forming Christ event called for an explanation of apocalyptic dimensions. The cosmic significance of Christ crucified and risen stands behind and within every word of the New Testament. Revelation is but the cre-

scendo of this orientation. Now more than ever, we need visionary eyes like John's to distinguish dragons from living creatures, Babylon from Zion, to be moved in worship and wonder at our Lord Jesus Christ. Revelation bears witness to this truth. It is a score that dazzles and disturbs, pulls and provokes, alters and expands as it confronts and denounces all false security with the brightness of His presence.

The Apocalypse has much to say to the churches, but it is at least *blessing* for all who read, *prophecy* for all who see, *completion* for all who labor, the *word* for all who remember, *testimony* for all who follow, *patience* for all who hope, and *trumpet* for all with ears to hear. ■■

Jason Overman serves the Church in Jasper, AR, with his wife, Stephanie, and their five-year-old twins Tabitha and Isaac. He also works for a local newspaper.



Questions & Answers

Q Was Jesus' resurrection really a spiritual and not a physical event, as some claim? How many resurrections will follow the first one at Christ's return, and when will each be? Will some people not be resurrected?

A The Bible reveals several resurrections of great import, not counting the temporary ones like Lazarus (John 11), Tabitha (Acts 9:36-43), and others who later died another "first" death:

1. The resurrection of Christ from the tomb is reported at the end of all four Gospels (Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, John 20). Along with His death, Jesus' resurrection becomes the centerpiece and cornerstone of the good news in Acts (2:24ff, for example) and the Epistles (1 Cor. 15:1-4ff).

We have many reasons to believe that this was a physical event. Examples: 1) His tomb and grave clothes were emptied, and no one ever produced the corpse; 2) Jesus showed the disciples His scarred, resurrected body; 3) He ate food; and 4) the quick transformation of the apostles after Christ's raising is best explained by His physical appearances, not "spiritual" ones. As firstfruits from among the dead (vv. 20-23), Jesus' literal return from the grave was the prototype of our own bodily resurrection in the future.

2. The resurrection of the believer from spiritual death to new life in Christ is also a fact of the gospel. It is taught by the Lord Jesus when He says, "The hour is coming, *and now is*, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live" (John 5:25) — an idea fully consistent with Jesus' teaching elsewhere in John. Paul elaborates in Romans 6, where he identifies baptism

as our death, burial, and resurrection, and in Ephesians 2, where he affirms that those saved by grace through faith have already been resurrected (from their sins) along with Jesus to God's right hand in the heavens! In this sense, Christians have already been raised from the dead.

3. The resurrection of the righteous dead from their graves when Christ returns to begin His earthly reign is taught in Revelation 20:1-6, where it is called the "first resurrection." From a pre-millennial perspective, this is the same resurrection Paul anticipated for the saints in 1 Corinthians 15:23, 51-57 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. This marvelous event reflects the reality of Christ's bodily resurrection two thousand years ago. As one was a physical event, so will the other be.

4. The general resurrection of the dead after Christ's one thousand-year reign, foretold in Revelation 20:7-15, leads to the final Judgment at the great white throne. At this time, all those who reject the gospel of life are cast into the lake of fire, along with death and the grave. This passage harmonizes with 1 Corinthians 15:24ff: "Then comes the end . . . For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death."

Some students theorize that not all the dead will be raised at the end, but only those who have trusted and obeyed the Lord. Jesus, however, says that "all who are in the graves" will come forth for the judgment — both those who have done well and those who have done evil (John 5:28, 29). Hebrews 9:27 and Revelation 20:13 confirm this: All will be resurrected; none shall escape this final appointment with God.

— Elder Calvin Burrell

The belief in some form of life after death is common to most religions. A major reason for this is belief in the immortality of the soul — that conscious life continues after the death of the body. This axiom of most religious people is considered by this author contrary to the Bible, which defines death as the cessation of life for the whole person.

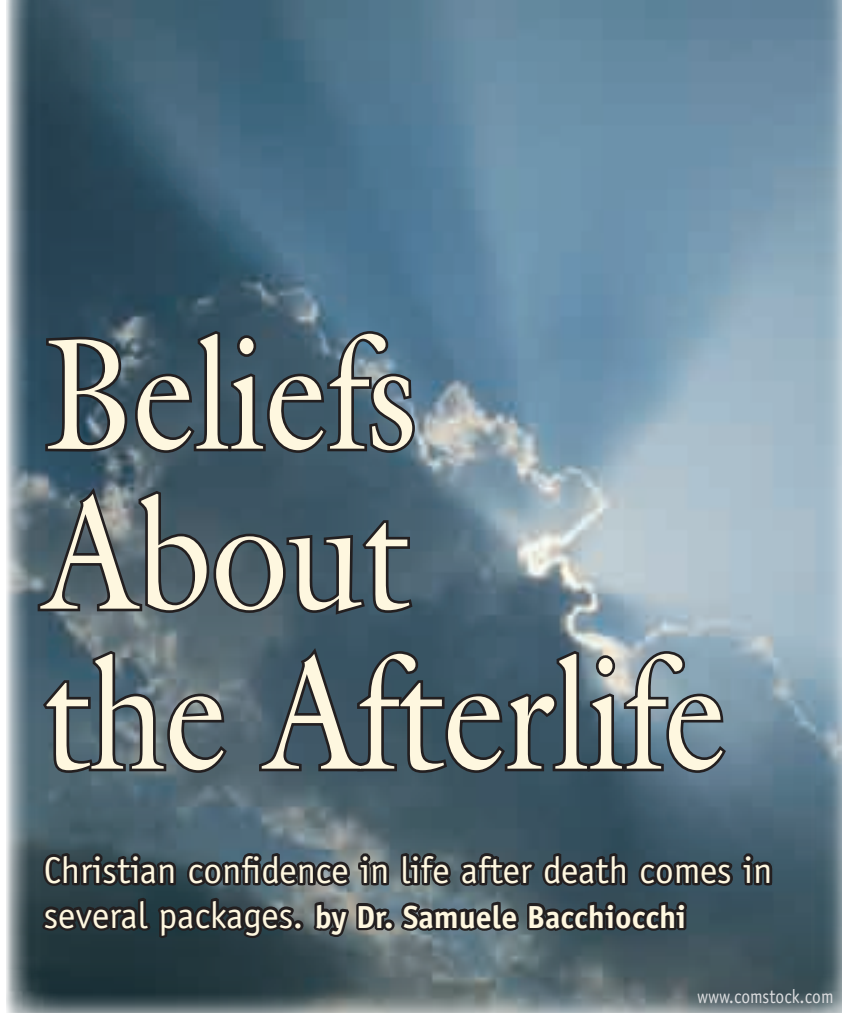
In this article we will observe how three major wings of Christianity view life after death: Roman Catholics, conservative Protestants, and liberal Christians.

Roman Catholics

The Catholic Church teaches that when a person dies, the soul leaves the body and is immediately evaluated in a *particular judgment* that determines three possible destinations for the disembodied soul: heaven, hell, or purgatory.

Heaven. The new *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains that the souls of a few believers “who die in God’s grace and friendship and are perfectly purified, live for ever with Christ.”¹ They are taken immediately to their eternal rewards in heaven, where they enjoy the communion with the Trinity, the Virgin Mary, the saints, and the angels. “In the glory of heaven the blessed continue joyfully to fulfill God’s will.”²

Hell. Hell is where those who have died “with grave and unrepentant sins” which have not been wiped clean by church rituals,³ will be severely punished without any hope of relief, for eternity. As stated in *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: “Immediately after death the souls of



Beliefs About the Afterlife

Christian confidence in life after death comes in several packages. by Dr. Samuele Bacchiocchi

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those who die in a state of mortal sin, descend into hell, where they suffer the punishment of hell — ‘eternal fire.’”⁴

The torment of hell will last forever, without any prospect of relief or mercy, but the level of torture depends on the seriousness of the individual’s sin.

The teaching that sinners burn eternally in hell makes God appear like an inhumane father who locks away His rebellious children in a horrible hovel and forever throws away the key.

Purgatory. The Catholic Church teaches that “all those who die in God’s grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, . . . after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven.”⁵ Souls in purgatory are systematically tortured with fire until they have

paid the residual temporal punishment for their sins. The more purging is necessary, the longer a soul must suffer in purgatory until he becomes fully cleansed and acceptable for admission to heaven.

As stated in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, “the Church commends almsgiving, indulgences, and works of penance undertaken on behalf of the dead.”⁶ This means that friends and family can shorten the stay of their loved ones in purgatory by paying for masses, praying, buying indulgences, and making pilgrimages to holy shrines.

Conservative Protestants

The Protestant Reformation started in part as a reaction against superstitious medieval beliefs about the afterlife in pur-

gatory. The Reformers rejected as unbiblical and unreasonable the practice of buying and selling indulgences to reduce the stay of the souls in purgatory. However, the Reformers continued to believe that the souls of believers enjoy the bliss of heaven, while those of the unbelievers suffer the torments of hell. At the resurrection, the body is reunited with the soul, thus intensifying the pleasure of paradise or the pain of hell. Since that time, belief in heaven and hell has been accepted by most Protestant churches and is reflected in various Confessions.

For example, the Westminster Confession (1646), a definitive statement of (Calvinistic) Presbyterian beliefs in the English-speaking world, states:

The bodies of men after death return to dust, and see corruption; but their souls (which neither die nor sleep) having an immortal subsistence, immediately return to God who gave them. The souls of the righteous, being then made perfect in holiness, are received unto the highest heavens, where they behold the face of God in light and glory, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies: and the souls of the wicked are cast into hell, where they remain in torment and utter darkness, reserved to the judgment of the great day.⁷

Most conservative Protestants believe that there are *only* two possible destinations for the soul after death. One either passes immediately into the glories of heaven and the presence of God or is sent straight to the flames of hell for eternal punishment, with no possibility of reprieve. Any other destination for the soul,

such as the Catholic purgatory, is merely an “invented” doctrine.

Heaven. Heaven is reserved for those who have been justified by faith in Christ’s saving work. The souls of believers ascend to heaven immediately after death to live in the presence of Christ while awaiting the resurrection of their bodies. At the final resurrection, disembodied souls will receive new incorruptible bodies and will live in the presence of Jesus Christ in the new earth, where there is an absence of pain, disease, and depression.

Hell. Conservative evangelicals believe that at death the souls of those who have rejected Christ will be sent to hell, a place of punishment and eternal separation from God. Views vary on what torments hell may hold beyond isolation from God.


Liberal Protestants

In general, liberal Protestants believe that at death, people go either to heaven and the presence of God or to hell — i.e., separation from God. But liberals hold to a wide range of non-traditional views. For example, some define *heaven* as the triumph of self-giving, not as a new heaven and a new earth. “Heaven is cordial, honest, loving relationships,” says Gordon’s Kalland.⁸ Conversely, the same author writes that “Hell is estrangement, isolation, despair.”⁹ Dr. John Macquarrie of Union Theological Seminary describes hell as “not some external or arbitrary punishment that gets assigned for sin, but simply the working out of sin itself, as it destroys the distinctively personal being of the sinner.”¹⁰

Two assumptions

Catholic and Protestant views of life after death stem from two assumptions: 1) Death is the separation of the immortal soul from the mortal body; 2) The soul is an independent, immaterial, and immortal component that survives the death of the body.

Are these assumptions correct? Does the Bible teach that death is the separation of the immortal soul from the mortal body? Does the soul survive the death of the body and continue to exist in the bliss of paradise or the torment of hell? To answer these questions, we turn our attention to the biblical view of death.

Editor’s note: The author’s views of biblical teaching on life after death, closely approximating those of the BA, may be read at www.cog7.org/BA. 

Samuele Bacchiocchi is a retired professor at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, MI. This article is from his forthcoming book *Popular Beliefs: Are They Biblical?*



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1. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1994, p. 267.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 268.
3. “Hell,” *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, R. C. Broderick, Ed., 1987.
4. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1994, p. 270.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 268.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 269.
7. Westminster Confession, chap. 32, as cited by John H. Leith, ed., *Creeks of the Churches*, 1977, p. 228.
8. “New Views of Heaven & Hell,” *Time*, Friday, May 19, 1967.
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*

During the first forty of the fifty days between His last Passover and Pentecost, Jesus continued to instruct His disciples. Just before He ascended to heaven, He told them they would soon be baptized with the Holy Spirit, enabling them to witness all over the world (Acts 1:5, 8).

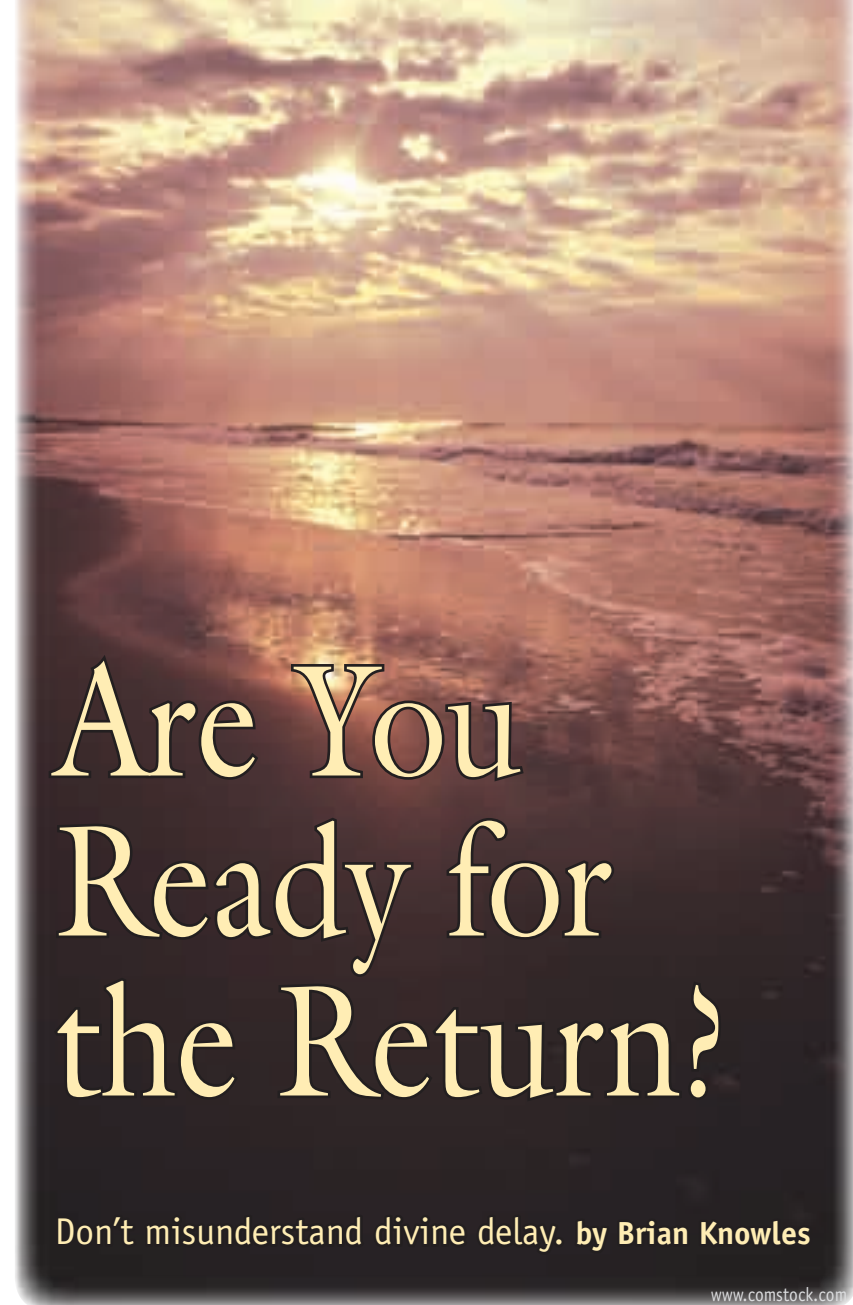
Suddenly, Jesus rose and disappeared behind a cloud (v. 9). The disciples looked intently at the sky, trying to figure where Jesus had gone and perhaps when or whether He was coming back. Then two “men” (angels, evidently) appeared before them to explain:

“Men of Galilee,” they said, “why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven” (v. 11).

This inspired promise forever settles the question of whether Jesus would return to earth. What we don’t know, however, is *when* Christ will return. Nearly two thousand years have elapsed since the angels spoke those words, and Jesus still has not come back.

From time to time, some prophecy buffs claim to know almost exactly when the Lord will return. They base their predictions on a variety of calculations and convoluted theories. Most of us, if we’re honest, have no idea when Christ will again set foot on this earth. We just know He will.

Nor do we have any real *need* to know precisely when Jesus will return. We do not need to understand the mechanics and logistics of that event. All we need to know is that when



Are You Ready for the Return?

Don't misunderstand divine delay. by Brian Knowles

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it’s His Father’s time (Matthew 24:36; Acts 1:7), Jesus will show up as suddenly as He left. And when He does, big things will happen. Our Lord is coming to complete the parts of His divine commission not fulfilled the first time around (Isaiah 61:1, 2; Luke 4:14-19).

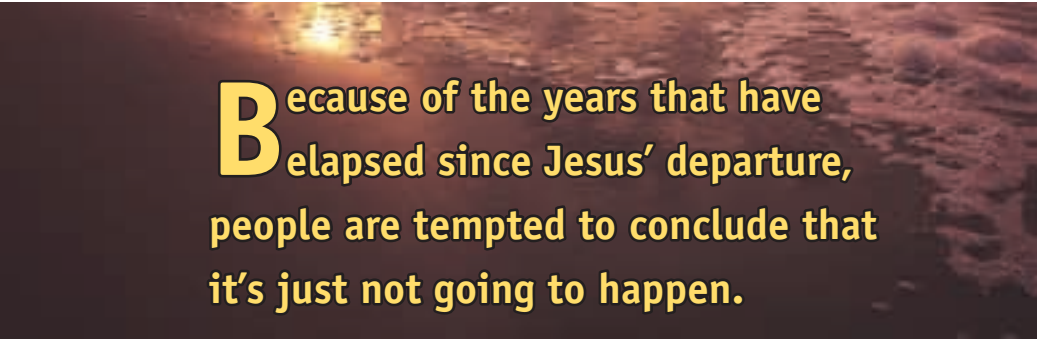
Jesus could return within the lifetime of people reading this article; many expect He will. Or another century, another millennium, could pass before He arrives on the scene. The point is, every generation of Christians has a duty to live in readiness.

Jesus instructed us to prepare for His return and to watch.

Avoid deceptions

One way of preparing is to avoid deceptions. In His Olivet prophecy concerning end times, Jesus said: “Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many” (Matthew 24:4, 5).

Prior to the appearance of the true Messiah, a plethora of false messiahs will appear — not a few, but many! Jesus warned against



Because of the years that have elapsed since Jesus' departure, people are tempted to conclude that it's just not going to happen.

being fooled by them (vv. 23-27).

One characteristic of false Messiahs is that they always seem to be "hidden" in secret caves or desert locations until a moment of revealing. Or they may reside in an obscure monastery high in the Himalayas. Their appearance is often accompanied by prophets, gurus, and oracles who claim inside information about the figure soon to appear. Their job is to create a sense of expectation and anticipation.

Almost every religion – including Christianity – is capable of producing a false Messiah. When the real Anointed One of God appears, He will be visible to all. It will not be a clandestine arrival but one that is like lightning flashing across the sky. Jesus left in clouds; He will return in clouds.

Faithful in service

Another way to prepare for the Second Coming is to remain faithful in service to Christ. This is especially important because Jesus will return when people in general are not expecting it (Matthew 24:36-44). His faithful and wise servants, though, will be found doing His work when He comes back. Jesus commends them (v. 46).

Because Jesus spoke these words to His core disciples, He likely was referring to church

leadership. A wise servant will be found zealously carrying out his duties to the church. He will be feeding the flock with sufficient and nourishing spiritual food, no matter the doctrinal differences or personal quirks. The same call to loyalty and diligent service clearly applies to all who are followers of Christ, whether or not they are leaders.

Because of the years that have elapsed since Jesus' departure, people are tempted to conclude that it's just not going to happen. Almost two millennia is a long time to us. But to the Lord, it's only a couple of days (2 Peter 3:8). The danger of delay is that leaders and laity alike can slip back into the careless behavior of the unconverted. They'd rather party than serve the cause of Christ. Jesus addressed this:

"But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, 'My master is staying away a long time,' and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards" (Matthew 24:48, 49).

Our Lord's warning to anyone who abandons his brethren to resume the ways of the world is a strong one (vv. 50, 51).

Wise waiting


Many more passages could be brought to bear on this issue. Not the least of them is the par-

able of the ten virgins (25:1-13). Only half of them were prepared to meet the Bridegroom.

To be ready for the Lord's return according to this story, we must keep a constant supply of oil so that our lamps (lights) shine steadily through earth's dark night. The light motif is often used in Scripture to describe the true faith and earnest practice of God's converted children (see Matthew 5:14-16; John 1:4-9; 2 Corinthians 4:6; Ephesians 5:8-13, 14; Philippians 2:15). In each text, the light that shines through believers is evidence that they have known the Lord Jesus Christ and are daily influenced by His Spirit residing within.

According to God's Word, some Christians will give up on the idea of His return. Some will degenerate to unChristian behavior. Others will begin to abuse their fellow Christians. Some will carelessly allow the Spirit within them to run dry and be caught with their spiritual pants down.

Ideally, when Christ returns, He will find us maturing as Christians on every front. Those of us who highly value Jesus will be living as though His coming were imminent, because it is. We will be filled with the Spirit – the oil in our lamps – and be growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord (2 Peter 3:18).

Perhaps it's time to do some soul-searching and take inventory of our spiritual condition. 

Brian Knowles writes from Monrovia, CA. Scripture quotations were taken from the *New International Version*.



Why I Study Bible Prophecy

by Godwin Prospere

Prophecy and history are the same events described in different tense. What is history today was prophecy in the past. What is prophecy today will become history in the future. The two concepts are inseparable, yet different in time. Consider why the study of prophecy is important.

- It validates the accuracy of Scripture. The fulfillment of hundreds of prophecies from various messengers testifies that God's Word is true.
- It elevates the Messiah to His rightful place in the universe. From Genesis to Malachi, many predictions of Christ's first coming, highlighting every facet of His life, have been fulfilled.
- Though given by different prophets at different times, divine revelation has no discrepancies. In this postmodern age, prophecy serves as a sanctuary of hope, tranquility, and spiritual therapy to satiate empty hearts.
- Prophecy purifies the believer. It affords deeper understanding of practical Christian living, as well as the destiny of humanity. It propels us to walk carefully in the corridor of righteousness and escape the pending judgment of God.

• An understanding of Bible prophecy is cutting edge technology to the believer. New Age teaching, Eastern philosophy, and Western religion have disillusioned the minds of the masses. Scientists' theories of relativism, evolution, and naturalism assault the nucleus of biblical principle. We desperately need scripturally sound prophetic interpretation.

• Prophecy is an effective tool in evangelism, a fundamental component of the church's mission (2 Peter 1:16-19). A sound knowledge of scriptural eschatology enhances our evangelistic efforts.

• Bible prophecy is the single source of understanding God's plan for Israel. God made a covenant with Abraham, established this unique relationship with his descendants (2 Samuel 7:24), and promised its unchangeable nature irrespective of their fidelity. Prophecy unlocks the mystery of current world events, the Middle East crisis, and the uncertainty about Israel's future.

Despite the reasons to study prophecy, some Christians have abandoned it. They believe, evidently, that future events are irrelevant to us today.

Some say that studying Bible

prophecy results in misinterpretation of Scripture, thus repeating the miscalculation of many in the past. Setting dates and seasons when Christ will return has affected the credibility of Scripture for many and has caused the impious to ridicule.

We should learn from the mistakes of teachers in the past. We can avoid such errors if we allow Scripture to interpret itself and if we avoid fanaticism. Putting prophecy on the back burner is like rejecting the Bible because witches used it to cast spells. Abuses should be refuted, but we should continue to make a concerted effort to study prophecy through the Spirit's direction.

It is also widely believed that the prophetic texts are mostly inscrutable, so why waste time trying to decipher esoteric writing? Why read the perplexing symbolic language of Revelation? It is an exercise in futility.

God's divine declarations are the projection of His plans and purpose for the world. God is sovereign; His supreme purpose will be fulfilled unimpeded (Isaiah 14:24-27). The sure word of prophecy maintains its validity and authenticity, even if it is misinterpreted or misrepresented.

The church needs to pay more attention to eschatological events but must maintain equilibrium among the various elements of biblical studies. A glimpse of the future helps us focus and gives greater urgency and purpose as we press to the mark of our high calling in Christ Jesus. ■■■

Godwin Prospere serves at the Tower of Faith CoG7 in Orlando, FL.



Sitting Shiva for the Second Coming

We need not dread death — or Christ's return.
by Michael Flores

Andy Heyward—Dreamstime.com

Death feels stuffy and heavy. Standing over my grandmother's coffin, I thought the chapel seemed that way. I hugged my grandfather and father; their tears moved me to trembling. The words and tears that fell on me increased the burden I felt. Now I wonder if anything I said or did caused my fellow mourners to tremble anew at the hope of God's promise.

One Bible writer claims that the day of mourning is better than the day of feasting (Ecclesiastes 7:2). A person's death often awakens our sense of mortality, and that weighs us down. We feel like Loretta Lynn sang, "Everybody wants to go to heaven but nobody wants to die."

Even Jesus displayed this human trait by asking for His cup of mortality to pass from Him (Matthew 26:39). Death is scary, sad, confusing — an apparent end shrouded in mystery. And we shrink from it.

Have we lost the Bible's perspective? Jesus taught that death is not the end. There is rescue, hope, and life in the resurrection when He returns.

That presents another problem. Often we view the second coming of Christ with the same fear and confusion with which we view death. But Jesus wants us to understand how to wait productively for His return.

Jewish tradition

We can do that by understanding the Jewish tradition called "sitting shiva." *Shiva* is a seven-day mourning period after death that allows surviving family and friends to focus on their feelings in the healing process. It allows survivors to struggle through to

an acceptance of life without the deceased.

Consider Lazarus' death. When Jesus showed up at Bethany, He entered the house of mourning where Martha, Mary, and their companions had been mourning four days — sitting shiva. Jesus joined the other mourners, weeping (John 11:35). However, Jesus did not accept death as the end: "Your brother will rise again," He told Martha (v. 23). His confidence in the face of death contrasted with Mary's acceptance of the obvious (vv. 21-27).

Shiva and the Second Coming

Jesus' observance of Hebraic tradition by sitting shiva with Mary and Martha parallels the larger story we live daily and our expectation of Christ's return.

Just as most of us feel uncomfortable around death, so many people are apprehensive about the Second Coming. Like Chick-*en Little*, we may look for the sky to fall and associate the return mostly with fear and confusion. The inevitable end of this world, perhaps not far off, sometimes evokes feelings we would rather avoid. At some time we all look up and wonder, "Is He coming? When? What will it be like?" — similar to the questions we ask about death.

Death, then, is both a reflection and a preview of Christ's return. Both are ends; both evoke similar feelings. Maybe we should take a similar approach to each.

We can cope well with death by keeping faith in the Second Coming. Jesus' example shows us that we do this by waiting



When the end time provokes insecurities, we need to sit with each other and struggle together with our doubts.

with each other, by joining in the company of fellow strugglers. Just as Jesus was moved by mourners when Lazarus died, so we should be moved by others' sorrow. But we must remember, as Jesus did, that we don't sorrow in vain. A resurrection is coming once Jesus returns!


Sitting shiva with others can move them to hope just as Jesus' faith in God's promise of rescue moved Mary and Martha to confidence. Does your faith re-inspire your neighbor's faith in God?

The communal ways we cope with death may help us keep faith in Christ's return. Living after the death and burial of our Savior, we all sit shiva for His return. We wait and struggle to find a way to live without His physical presence in a post-burial world. We must wait together.

Unlike the earthly tradition of shiva, we wait expecting rescue as Jesus did for Lazarus. This may be a post-burial world, but it is also a post-Resurrection world to those who believe. Struggling with our faith, we may, in our human nature, wilt under doubt. But in a communal shiva with the Spirit's presence, we find inspiration. Each believer reminds the other of the coming promise: Jesus is risen, and He will return! We believe together.

Non-stop living

Sitting shiva is not only about mourning but also about living. The purpose of shiva was to allow the survivors to return to life. When Jesus participates in this tradition, He is participating in humanity's attempt to continue living. After death comes life; after the end comes the new kingdom. Jesus is calling His people to never stop living.

When death takes a loved one, we weep with each other and keep each other confident. When the end time provokes insecurities, we need to sit with each other and struggle together with our doubts. Together we can cope and find meaning in death and in times like these. As one people, we wait in a world of shiva for the clouds to roll back, the trump to resound, and the dead to be raised! 

Michael Flores

serves at the Willard St. church in San Antonio, TX. He and his wife, Victoria, expect their first child in January.



Prophecy Sampler

Daniel 9: Past or Future?

In this chapter, we find Daniel much concerned about what would happen to Jerusalem after the 70 years of desolation prophesied by Jeremiah (25:11). In the first 23 verses, Daniel prayed, confessing his sins and the sins of his people. Then the angel Gabriel came, touched Daniel, and gave him the information he sought (see vv. 24-27).

To understand this vision, we use prophetic time in which each day counts for a year (Numbers 14:34; Ezekiel 4:6). Thus, the 70 weeks spoken of by the angel would be not just 490 days but 490 years. The beginning date for this prophecy was 457 B.C., when the command to restore and rebuild Jerusalem went forth (Ezra 7:11-26). From that time until the coming of Messiah, the Prince (Jesus) would be seven weeks (49 years) plus 62 weeks (434 years), or a total of 483 years until the anointing of the Most Holy. It was 483 years after 457 B.C., or about A.D. 27, that Jesus was baptized and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him like a dove.

Now we still have one more week (seven years) of the prophetic vision to account for. Daniel 9:26 says the Messiah (Jesus) would be cut off after (seven and) 62 weeks. Isaiah 53:8, 9 tells why He would be cut off (“For the transgressions of My people”), and Daniel 9:27 tells us when: “Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; but in the middle of the week . . .” (after three-and-a-half years of ministry and on an actual Wednesday), Jesus was crucified, causing the sacrifice and oblation to cease (Matthew 27:50, 51).

The disciples continued to confirm the covenant with signs and miracles for three-and-a-half more years until Paul was chosen as Apostle to the Gentiles (about A.D. 34). Before that generation had fully passed, General Titus came with his Roman armies and surrounded Jerusalem, placing it under siege and great tribulation until it fell in A.D. 70. Those

in Judea fled to the mountains, and the Jews were without a homeland (Daniel 9:26b, 27b) until 1948, when the modern state of Israel was formed.

Thus, the 70 weeks of Daniel 9, a great prophecy of the coming Messiah, was fulfilled in the first century. And the wider effects are still seen and felt today.

— Wilburn McDowell
McMinnville, TN



Watching the Signs

“Will Syria Retaliate for Israeli Air Raid?” was the headline in a 9-21-07 newsletter from Jerusalem. Reading the account, I noted that the U.S. media carried no major report of the incident.

Later I found it buried in the back pages of our news. On September 6 Israeli warplanes surgically targeted a small area at Bir al-Harj on the Euphrates River, near Syria’s border with Turkey. The target was a facility, disguised as an agricultural research center, which Israel believes is used for testing weapons of mass destruction — nuclear, chemical, biological. North Korean experts are known to visit the facility and assist in the experiments.

North Korea’s agreement with the Bush Administration to shut down its nuclear program has been prominently in the news. This includes a ban on North Korea’s sale of nuclear material to certain other governments. It appears that some heads of North Korea’s nuclear industry and army generals may have acted fast to move banned merchandise out of the country. U.S. intelligence reportedly followed undercover transactions, resulting in nuclear-related merchandise being designated as “cement” and loaded on a 1,700-tonne freighter under a



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North Korean flag. Americans refrained from halting or searching the vessel before it docked on September 3 and delivered its load to the phony Syrian agricultural station on the Euphrates.

It appears that Israel clearly welcomed the opportunity to destroy the Syrian facility engaged in developing nuclear weapons. It is also reported that this episode that centered on the Israeli air attack is part of a comprehensive campaign only just begun.

Will Syria retaliate for the Israeli air raid? This is the pending question three weeks after its alleged WMD factory was destroyed. By the time this is published and read, we should know the answer.

As the Scriptures indicate in Daniel 2:44 and elsewhere, the Lord God is bringing the nations of the world to a great climax. Someday — we know not when — Jesus will return to earth, set up His kingdom, and restore all things. The signs implore us to be prepared by proper relationship with the heavenly Father through His Son Jesus, be energized by the power of the Holy Spirit, and learn to think and live like Jesus in our worldview.

— David Kauer, Pastor
Sacramento, CA



Don't be Surprised

No, do not be surprised — the time is coming when all those who are dead and buried will hear his voice and out they will come — those who have done right will rise again to life, but those who have done wrong will rise to face judgment!

That's how J. B. Phillips rendered Jesus' words in John 5:28, 29. St. John described the same in another book: "The sea gave up its dead, and death and the grave gave up the dead which were in them.

And men were judged, each according to what he had done" (Revelation 20:12, 13).

All. When we read that word in John 5:28, we think of every human being: our ancestors, people here and now, and those yet to come.

But is that all? What about those who many of us only hear about or are vaguely aware of: the little ones who die before being born? Are they included in the "all"? Does God include children who die before birth in the number of people to be resurrected, or, as J. B. Phillips puts it, to rise again to life?

What we think on this subject is less important than what God thinks.

Look at the first sentence in the quote from John 5:28, 29. It mentions those who have done right and those who have done wrong. Surely, unborn babies have done neither, just like those little ones who are born. And we call them innocent, don't we?

Imagine the multiple millions of mums and dads coming up in their resurrection, parents who had lost children before birth, or not many years after.

Imagine a loving, caring, and merciful God raising back to life those young children, popping them into the laps of their mums and dads and saying to them, "Here is your chance to love them and to rear them up."

Neither the parents nor the children had seen justice in this life. At the resurrection, they will rise to face justice because Jesus is the judge. You couldn't get a more compassionate judge than He.

Impossible? The Bible tells us about the resurrection of the dead. It also records Jesus as saying, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26).

All things.

And if someone is still in doubt: As I have said to many an atheist, just wait and see.

Or, as J. B. Phillips says, don't be surprised.

— Ernie Klassek
Perth, Western Australia

The image shows the interior of a mosque, likely the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul. The architecture is characterized by a large central dome and smaller domes, all supported by massive piers. The walls and ceiling are covered in intricate Islamic geometric and floral patterns. Numerous stained glass windows of various shapes and sizes are set into the walls, allowing light to filter through in colorful patterns. The floor is covered with red carpeting, and rows of wooden pews are visible in the foreground. The overall atmosphere is one of grandeur and historical significance.

Islam: Facing the Challenge

The Bible declares curses on anyone who preaches
a message other than the Jesus of Scripture. by William C. Hicks

Since the terrorism of September 11, 2001, the Western psyche has been awakened to an age-old competitor for the heart, mind, and soul of humanity. Even in our post-modern mindset where the mystical and eclectic are viewed with greater interest than the faith of our forefathers, Islam has been met with paranoia, skepticism, and concern because of the propensity for violence in its fundamentalist expressions. The open challenge presented by a religion seeking nothing less than world domination threatens to capsize our Western moral ambivalence that values plurality and religious tolerance above all. For contemporary Christians, compelled by the Word and Spirit to witness Jesus to those imprisoned in such false religion, the challenge is enormous. The body of Christ is ill prepared for it and ignorant of the beliefs and practices that are taking millions to destruction.

This article offers a scriptural perspective that reveals Islam as a doctrine of demons and suggests that our ignorance and indifference help drive Islam toward its goal of world domination. My work in missions on five continents has brought contact with various expressions of this religion that may be the fastest growing on earth. It is the greatest threat to the world order of my lifetime.

What draws so many to this religion? What do we as Christians need to know to correctly address Islam? Much of the concern about Islam today appears to be a reaction to its violence rather than a realization of its inherent evil. The desire to find a way to coexist with it seems to override our concern for the

eternal welfare of those trapped by it.

The neutrality and blindness of the West in our politically correct openness toward Islam are two reasons people embrace it. This is in stark contrast with the clarity expressed by those who live with Islam daily. After months of dialogue, I am counseling for baptism a former Muslim who now trusts the biblical Christ, in contrast to the false Jesus Islam teaches. This man, now living in an Islamic state, is quick to remind me that despite current concerns over countries like Iran, the God of Scripture has used these "Persians" in His plans throughout history for His glory. He also informs me that the Muslims in his homeland do not reflect the same tolerance for Christians that we westerners give Islam in this culture. The legislated religious freedom and indifference of the West do not exist in the Islamic republics, nor is this freedom the goal of Islam in general. He has warned me that should I have opportunity to pass within contact range for his baptism, we could both be executed — if discovered.

I haven't based this writing on some academic or linguistic introduction to Islam in a theological sense. Rather, I intend to raise awareness to the basic

beliefs and practices of millions who claim Mohammed as their prophet and Allah as the only true God. I offer this article hoping that readers will better prepare themselves to give a biblical defense against Islam in all of its manifestations and to give a clearer testimony of the only way of salvation offered to humanity by faith in the Jesus Christ of Scripture alone. The Allah of Islam and the God of the Bible are definitely not the same!

Why Islam?

The term *Islam* is derived from the Arabic verb "to submit" (to Allah's will). It is by no means a unified religion, having various divisions and sects such as Sunni, Shi'ite, Sufi, Wahhabi, Druze, Alawism, Ahmadya, and Sikh. It is a simple religion that sees itself as the legitimate successor to Judaism and Christianity. Islam is the correct name for the religion that the prophet Mohammed claimed was revealed to him by the angel Gabriel. The content of the Koran (Quran), however, will assure Christians who read it that the angel speaking to Mohammed was not the Gabriel in our Bible. Even Mohammed and his wife, Kadija, wondered if it had been a demonic experience that left him in seizures, making noises

The desire to find a way to coexist with Islam seems to override our concern for the eternal welfare of those trapped by it.

Devil's Fingerprint?

Islam can be summarized in six basic beliefs, six religious duties, and worship on the sixth day.

• Six basic beliefs

Allah. He is one, with no partners or equals.

Angels. Koran came from "angel" Gabriel to Mohammed.

Holy books. Old Testament Law and Psalms (both now corrupted), plus the Koran.

Prophets. Allah sent 124,000 prophets; Mohammed is greatest — the "Seal of the prophets."

Predestination. All is determined by Allah's will.

Judgment. People's lives will be placed on a scale. If good works outweigh the bad, people go to paradise. If not, they go to hell.

• Six duties

Shahada - testimony, creed of Islam. "There is no god except Allah, and Muhammad is His Messenger."

Salat - prayer. Muslims pray five times a day, bowing toward Mecca.

Zakat - almsgiving. Muslims give a percentage of income to charity.

Sawm - fasting. During the lunar month of Ramadan, food and drink are forbidden from sunrise to sunset.

Hajj - pilgrimage. Once a lifetime to Mecca.

Jihad - struggle. Muslims war to get victory in their personal lives, or to defend Islam against its enemies.

• Sixth day honored. Friday is its special day of prayer.

Is the apparent affinity to the number six indicative of the real identity of the angel that gave this religion? The 666 here may be speculative, inflammatory, or it may be relevant. Are we witnessing the rise of something of biblical proportions (Revelation 13:18)? Let the reader judge.

— William C. Hicks

like an animal as he received the testimony. This admittedly illiterate fellow then had others write down the words given him in those encounters (seizures), and he later organized them into the Koran.

Muslims claim that the Scripture of Jews and Christians is corrupted and not trustworthy, while they also give lip service to some of its teachings. The Koranic

accounts of various events are also different from the biblical accounts. The Muslims teach a Jesus who was not deity and was not crucified or resurrected. They deny any need of atonement before their Allah. They redefine the terms *messiah* and *prophet* and attribute to Mohammed many of Christ's unique claims: prophet, intercessor, Savior, and Lord. Their strict dogma and

fantastic claims to spiritual origin from their "angel" draw many in for a closer look.

Though Islam is growing rapidly where poverty and ignorance provide opportunity for its promotion, it is finding allegiance even in the West. The open anti-Christian bias of the secular intellectual establishment cannot be overestimated in the spread of Muslim faith. Today it is not unusual to see historic, humanist, and liberal "Christian" teachings — particularly those that deny the Christ of Scripture and His written Word — quickly embraced by Islam. One can read quotes by Western authorities like Thomas Jefferson or Abraham Lincoln in the Islamic training materials today.

For example, *Know Your Islam*, by Yousuf N. Lalljee, opens with this from a well-recognized Nobel Prize winner:

If any religion has a chance of ruling over England, nay Europe, within the next hundred years, it can only be Islam. . . . I believe, that if a man like Muhammad were to assume the dictatorship of the modern world, he would succeed in solving its problem, in a way that would bring it much needed peace and happiness. — *George Bernard Shaw (preface)*.

Even the recent movies that deny the deity of Jesus, such as *The Da Vinci Code*, find great support in Islam. The anti-Christian media and other liberal elements in the West make them great allies.

What Christians can do

Concerning the realities of our conflict in this world, Paul wrote: "For we wrestle not against flesh

and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Ephesians 6:12).

He said not to be surprised that false apostles should come based upon the existence of evil angels:

For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works (2 Corinthians 11:13-15).

And so it is that what could be the fastest growing religion on earth was started by a lying "angel" who made Mohammed his apostle centuries ago. This is not about intolerance; it is about truth and lies. It is a life-and-death issue.

In full agreement with these statements, Paul warned in Galatians 1:8, 9 that even an angel from heaven preaching any other gospel than the grace of Christ should be accursed, not tolerated. This speaks to the condition of false religionists before God and not in any way to our actions to harm them. Our goal is to reach them with the truth in Christ alone, not to convert them by force. Jesus laid down His life for His brethren, and we should not be surprised if His call to witness of Him to those who are lost might require the same of us (John 13:34, 35; 15:9-14).

Therefore, we must not be tolerant of those who teach against the gospel of Christ, nor should

Recommended Reading

Answering Islam: The Crescent and the Cross, by Norman L. Geisler, PhD, and Abdul Saleeb (Baker Books)

Reaching Muslims for Christ, by William J. Saal (Moody Press)

The Dark Side of Islam, by Dr. R. C. Sproul and Abdul Saleeb (Crossway Books)

Unveiling Islam: An Insider's look at Muslim Life and Beliefs, by Ergun Caner, PhD, and Emir Caner, PhD (Kregel Publications)

More than Prophet: An Insider's Response to Muslim Beliefs About Jesus & Christianity, by Emir Caner, PhD, and Ergun Caner, PhD (Kregel Publications)

Christian Jihad: Two Former Muslims Look at the Crusades and Killing in the Name of Christ, by Ergun Caner, PhD, and Emir Caner, PhD (Kregel Publications)

The Facts on Islam, by John Ankerberg and John Weldon, PhD (Harvest House)

Islam Unveiled: Disturbing Questions About the World's Fastest Growing Faith, by Robert Spencer (Encounter Books)

we look into false religion to find truth. We must confront them with the truth of Scripture in the hope that some will escape even the fires of hell (Jude 23).

Cause for concern

The willingness of some even in historic Christian circles to embrace Islam should cause us great concern. Recently an Episcopalian priest referred to herself as a Muslim, and a Catholic priest in Europe has called for using the term *Allah* as God in their services, apparently to open the door to Muslims. God only knows what could be next as Islam is embraced by the religious confusion that engulfs many because of their neglect in remembering our Book: the Bible! Read the warning of our Savior Jesus again:

"For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be short-

ened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened. Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; inasmuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. Behold, I have told you before" (Matthew 24:21-25).

May our heavenly Father give us courage to face the challenges ahead. May those He calls out of religious confusion, including Islam, hear His voice clearly and worship His Son for their own salvation and His glory (Philippians 2:9-11). ■■■

William C. Hicks serves the Church as pastor in Dryden, VA, and in Kingsport, TN, and as director of G. C. Missions Ministries. Scripture quotations are from the King James Version. The entire text of this article is available at www.therestofgod.org.

YOUTH REACH

Don't forget . . .

- SWD Winter Youth Retreat in Midlothian, TX, December 27-30
- MISSION POSSIBLE June 22-29, 2008 Conroe, TX
Contact: Kurt Lang, National FYC director, 541-517-1079 or nfyc@cog7.org
Jesus did the impossible: He came to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many. You ready to do the impossible and follow in His footsteps?

Watch Your Words!

"Oh, my God!" How many times did you hear that today? Or has it become so common that you don't even notice? Count the number of times you hear this phrase tomorrow. Include the times you say it, too.

You may be thinking, **Oh, now you're going to tell me that people who use this phrase are swearing.** You're right. It fits with "Jesus Christ," "God d___ it," and similar phrases.

So what's the big deal? Well, God's Word tells us, "Do not swear" (James 5:12, NIV). This is really telling us not to make an oath we can't keep. Don't say irreverent or irrelevant words — anything without value.

What is valuable is God's name. "You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God" (Exodus 20:7, NIV). God doesn't mess around when it comes to His name and character. God is a holy God. He deserves, even demands, that His name be honored. Every time we use His name carelessly, we misuse it.

The big deal is that our culture has misused God's name so long that it no longer has any meaning, and God himself no longer has much meaning. We have a choice: Either join the crowd and dishonor the Almighty, or step up our commitment to properly honor our heavenly Father.

While I'm on my "Jesus freak rampage," how about we quit substituting the "f" word with **frikkin** or **flippin**? It's the same attitude without the vulgar word. We shouldn't let the culture press us into its mold. We're better than that.

Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day He visits us (1 Peter 2:11, 12, NIV).

'Nuff said.

— Kurt Lang
NFYC Director

2T4G

Dear Young Person:

When I was your age. . . You love that beginning, don't you!

Way back then, somebody in NFYC challenged me to use at least five minutes every day to listen to God and talk to Him. 2T4G, they called it: Take Time for God.

So, still a teenager, I began reading Scripture daily. I haven't been perfect at it, but somewhere from 300 to 350 days each year, I read the Word. More than any other one thing, this helps me be a serious student of the Bible and a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Would you like to develop the 2T4G habit next year? We can help by sending you the easy-read **One Minute Bible** to get you started. Just e-mail us with 25 words or so of why you'll "Take Time for God" in 2008. If you're one of the first 25 youth to do that, we'll send you the Bible. Make sure you include your mailing address when you e-mail us at bibleadvocate@cog7.org.

One more thing: I want to say thanks to the NFYC leaders and writers who got me started with 2T4G 50 years ago. Thanks, Elden and Cecyl Fischer. Thanks, Hope Dais. Thanks, Dale Lawson. You guys were great!

— Editor Calvin Burrell

Western Canada Winter Retreat

"Staying Alive"

December 28 – 31, 2007

- Place: Island Lake Conference Centre at Crowsnest Pass, Alberta
- Price: \$100 per person; \$210 per family
- What to bring: sleeping bag or bedding, pillow, towel, hygiene supplies, Bible, positive attitude, warm clothing, snow boots, and a desire to become "spiritually fit."

Contact: Francisco or Deborah Chavez: 403-590-6976; 403-312-8823; 403-831-6221; fm.chavez@shaw.ca; cisco_21@hotmail.com

Contest Winners!!

Congratulations to these writers for their winning submissions to the BA contest.

First place: Brian Franks (Colorado Springs, CO), "Through Him" (\$100)

Second place: Arno Jacob Argueta (Ontario, CA), "You Loved Me So" (\$50)

Third place - Natalie Rivas (Dallas Melbourne, TX), "For the First Time" (\$15)

Unfortunately, no winning photos were submitted.

Thanks to these writers for sharing their work with us. Now we'd like to share the first-place winner with you:

Through Him

There's a mark on my head,
Given by my Father
Who art in heaven.
I've had it since the day I died.

There's a cross upon my shoulders;
I cannot lift it
With all my strength,
And I never will.

There's a thorn in my side,
One that threatens the life of me,
One that I can never pull free.

There're chains about my wrists.
I'm a sinner,
A slave for all these years,
In need of mercy.

There's a stumbling block before my foot.
I need light
Just to guide my steps,
That I may see my path.

There's a spirit on my heart,
One that will lift my cross, remove my thorn,
Undo my chains, and light my way.
Through man, impossible;
Through God, all things are achievable.

— Brian Franks

1st
Place

For more events and pictures, visit <http://nfyc.cog7.org>

Mail Bag



Relaxed allegiance?

Was that Christ on the cover [September '07]? Don't send me any more issues that have an imposter there or inside. Have you relaxed your allegiance to Exodus 20:4-6?

T. A.
Birmingham, AL

Editor's reply: We wanted to depict the written Word and the "flesh" that the Word became. We worship the Father and Son. The second commandment prohibits, not the making of, but the worship of any physical symbol of deity.

'Beyond Sabbath'

Your list, unfortunately, commingles the holidays of men with the holy days of God ["First Word," p. 3]. Birthdays, anniversaries, national holidays, Mother's and Father's days, etc., may be holidays of choice reflecting freedom in Christ, but God provides no such freedom regarding His law. Leviticus 23 contains the laws concerning festivals — the appointed feasts of the LORD.

R. S.
Westminster, CA

Editor's reply: When Leviticus 23 is considered a part of God's law for Christians, problems follow: A

full third of that chapter names the Levitical offerings and sacrifices that were essential to the feasts.

Words on war

I received my first BA, read this article ["Passing His Peace Along," p. 8], and closely agree. Once a Marine in Vietnam, I am now 100 percent disabled with PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder).

G. H.
Gainesville, FL

I hate war. I also believe that warfare is part of the imperfect human condition we all contend with. The author made a valiant attempt, but the New Testament doesn't address this question concisely. All we have are hints and random verses that we vainly attempt to mesh into a coherent answer. It feels forced. The question of warfare will continue to vex Christianity, and try as we might, we don't have a solid theological answer.

The cut point in this article was the way certain verses (Rom. 13:1-5, for example) were used. Essentially, I must see the Bible through the eyes of those who wrote it. We often assume the Bible was written with our cultural understanding. Rather, it was written with ancient Hebrew and first century Christian cultural understanding.

P. R.
Arvada, CO

Author's reply: Considering the socio-political climate of the first century (the Jews' rebellions, the Zealot option), Paul's advice in Romans 13 served more to steer Christians away from violent resistance than to endorse all governments. We are accustomed to reading this passage from

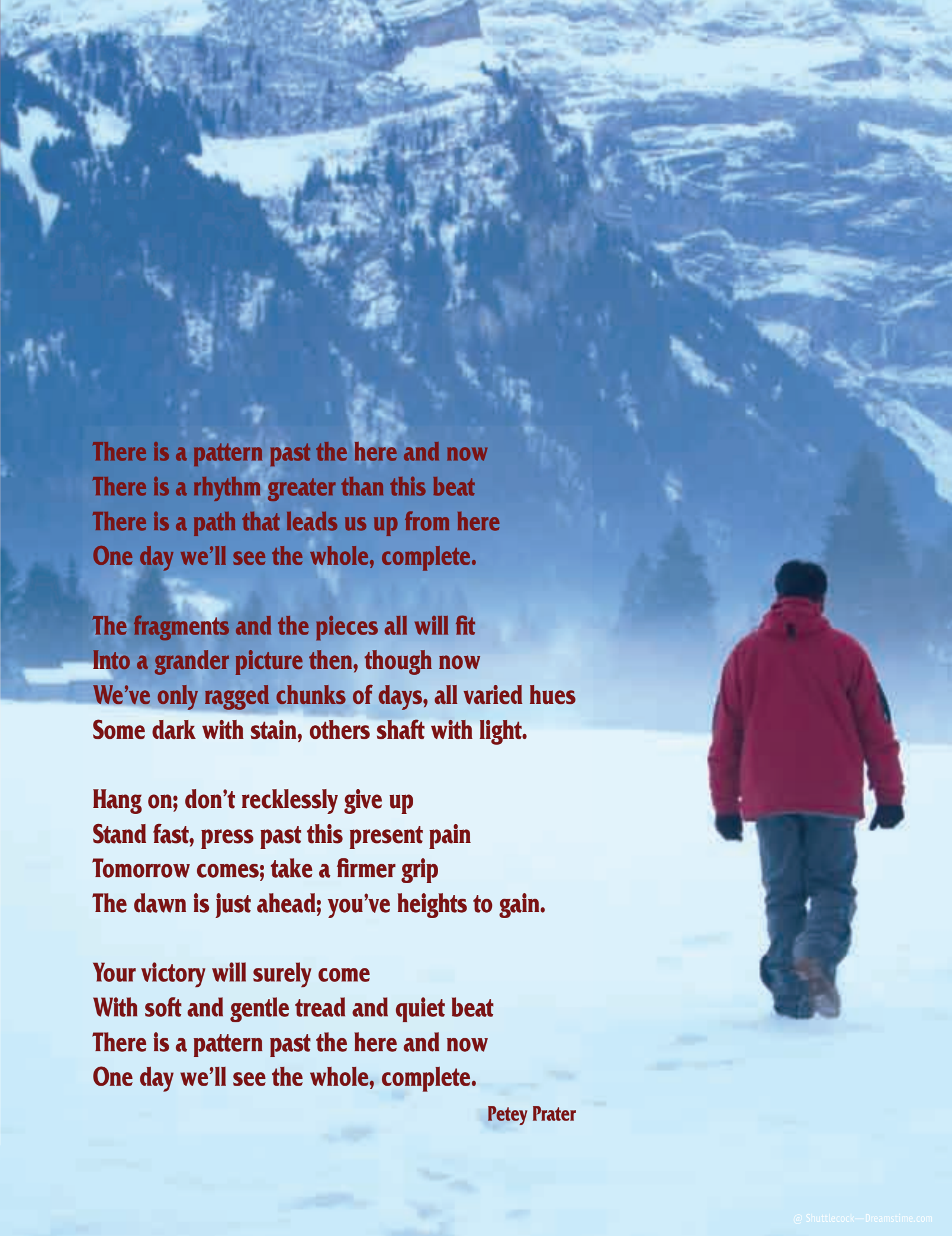
the stability and safety of modern democracy, but how might it have been read by those being persecuted by these same "authorities"? If we hear this text as one living under dictatorial oppression or as an American during the Revolution, it takes on a more radical (nonviolent) outlook.

Women in church

First Corinthians 14:33-37 is written for "all churches of the saints" ["Q & A," p. 7]. God commands women to be "under obedience" by quietly listening as the male teacher reads and explains the Scriptures. The plain sense of this, coupled with 1 Timothy 2:8—3:13, is that women are not to hold church offices or teach in an authoritative way, but be in subjection "as also says the law." When a church lays aside this word on leadership roles, it is a sign the Holy Spirit is departing. The next step is always casting aside other clear scriptures.

M. B.
Evarts, KY

Editor's reply: I admire your defense of the written Word. What is "plain" for you, however, is not always so — in light of other texts. The instances of female prophets in both Testaments don't find much space in your paradigm. To harmonize all related passages, the "silence" texts must be read in a sense not fully literal. Women have long spoken and sung in public worship with God's blessing, still obeying the call to submission. Finding balance among these texts is no step toward apostasy. It likely requires, however, that Paul's words cited above reflect some first-century cultural influence.

A person wearing a red jacket and dark pants is walking away from the camera on a snowy mountain slope. The background shows a vast, snow-covered mountain range with evergreen trees scattered across the slopes. The sky is a pale, hazy blue.

**There is a pattern past the here and now
There is a rhythm greater than this beat
There is a path that leads us up from here
One day we'll see the whole, complete.**

**The fragments and the pieces all will fit
Into a grander picture then, though now
We've only ragged chunks of days, all varied hues
Some dark with stain, others shaft with light.**

**Hang on; don't recklessly give up
Stand fast, press past this present pain
Tomorrow comes; take a firmer grip
The dawn is just ahead; you've heights to gain.**

**Your victory will surely come
With soft and gentle tread and quiet beat
There is a pattern past the here and now
One day we'll see the whole, complete.**

Petey Prater



What's new with . . .

National FYC

- SWD Winter Youth Retreat, December 27-30, in Midlothian, TX; 281-379-3964 or jrande@houston.rr.com

Missions Ministries

- Pioneer Missionary Training to Monterrey, Mexico, December 23-January 1

Publications

- New study on *Characteristics of the Early Church* begins January 5

Ministries Training System

- MTSonline course on Church Polity begins January 6

Spring Vale Academy

- Second Semester begins January 7; www.springvale.us

Winter G. C. meetings in Denver, February 1-5

Ministries Training System

Calvin Burrell, Director

Since Summit School of Theology's closure in 2001, MTS has provided six years of biblical and Christian ministry studies for the Church. More than a thousand students – both men and women – have completed one or more courses in our regional and online classrooms. And more than a hundred of these express interest in preparing for the Church's vocational ministry through intensive sessions and by other means.

Want to learn more about MTS? Visit our Web site: <http://mts.cog7.org>. There you'll find a list of classrooms, their dates of operation, and courses to be taught. Regional classroom study is open to any member of the Church who has a high school diploma.

Our next intensive Summer Session for both English and Spanish language students is scheduled June 2-12, 2008, in Denver, Colorado. It is planned especially for pastoral prospects, and a letter of invitation will be mailed in early January. If you want to be considered, call Calvin Burrell (303-452-7973) or Raul Lopez (713-828-9969).

MTS continues to expand its curriculum of online courses as well. Early in '08, for example, Church Polity, Church History, Biblical Interpretation (Part 1), and Emerging Culture and the Church will be offered. Be sure to visit the Web site or e-mail amber@cog7.org for more information.





Time: 9 a.m. - 6 p.m.; lunch provided
 Location: 4520 W. McDowell Rd.
 Guests: Bill Hicks; Larry Zaragoza
 All Arizona and Nevada churches welcome

NAMC Headed Back Home

The North American Ministerial Council (NAMC) will convene again October 6-11, 2008, at Gull Lake Ministries, a Christian conference center between Battle Creek and Kalamazoo, Michigan. Using the theme "Equipped for the Journey," ministers and other attendees will mark the sesquicentennial year of the founding of the Church of God (Seventh

Day) in the same southwest Michigan area where it began in 1858.

The council's agenda will include consideration of a comprehensive study guide to accompany the newly adopted Statement of Faith (2006) and a report from the New Covenant Study Committee.

Throughout this session, the council will host a CoG7 leadership conference. It will provide instructive seminars designed for the Church's lay leadership, along with the opportunity to observe the council in action. All lay pastors and lay Church leaders are invited to attend this council and conference. Mark your '08 calendar now.

— Robert Coulter
 NAMC President

Dedication in Aurora

The Spanish church in the Denver, Colorado, area purchased and remodeled a building in the suburb of Aurora, then dedicated it on September 8. Guests included several from El Paso, Texas, and from the Denver English Church. Central District Superintendent Tim Endecott, Denver English Pastor Mike Vlad, and G. C. President Whaid Rose took part in the dedication ceremonies.



Aurora, CO, church board:
 Top row: Fidel Jimenez and Ramon Mendez
 Bottom row (L to R): Refugio Aranguti, Eddie Villalba, and Surisadai Mendez



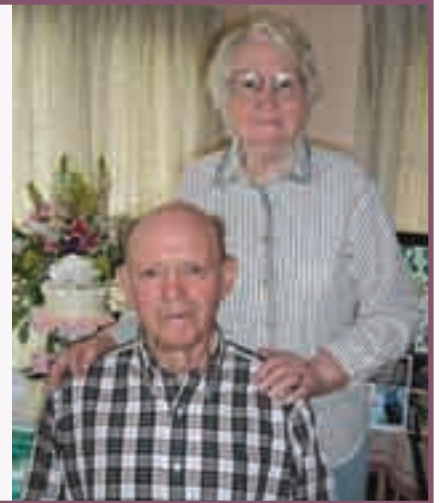
Seekers

A Bible-based program for ages 9 to 12, Seekers puts Jesus Christ at the center of all its activity. Designed and updated by the North American Women's Ministry, Seekers is a must for every church

with children.

To learn more, contact Dorothy Keim, 845 Elm Drive, Eugene, OR, 97404; 541-688-1707; dotkeim@hotmail.com.

Remarkable Family. William and Ivor Wallen of Milton-Freewater, OR, members in Walla Walla, WA, celebrated their 70th anniversary in September. Ivor was among the 27 children born to John W. Williams, a family whose influence in the Church is felt from Alabama to Oregon and beyond. William and Ivor met in the Crowder, OK, church in the 1920's. Their four children – Dean, Dennis, Beth (Carlson), and June (Brown) – are all married to their first spouses and are all active in CoG7.



LITES on in Stanberry

New year for the LITES team began in September with a week of “boot-camp” at the Jasper, Arkansas, campgrounds, followed by a few days of service with the senior retreat at the Dover, Oklahoma, campgrounds. Back home in Stanberry, Missouri, the team anticipates further study and challenge in applying the principles that were introduced in these early experiences.

Five new members joined the team this fall: Bryan Cleeton, Sacramento, CA; Oscar Suarez, Las

Vegas, NV; Habacuc Jara, The Dalles, OR; Leah Wallace, Eugene, OR; and Ambar Pereira, Knoxville, NC. For more information, visit the Web site, lites.cog7.org; phone 660-783-9555; or write LITES Ministries, 214 E. 2nd St., Stanberry, MO 64489.

Left to right: Pastor Melvin Sweet, Oscar Suarez, Habacuc Jara, Tim Howell, Caleb Cortez, Jordan Schlenker, Susan Steinhauser, Tim Steinhauser, Bryan Cleeton, Makayla Schlenker, Leah Wallace, Philip Leach, Ambar Pereira, Andrew Fernandez, Marybell Sweet, and Larry Marrs, LITES director





Central States Senior Retreat attendees pose outside the dining hall of Dover Campgrounds near Kingfisher, OK. This annual event, scheduled the third week of September, enjoys improved camp facilities that accommodate over 200 persons through camper hookups and in modern dorms at Dover.

Spring Vale Academy alumni groups made the most of fellowship opportunities at CoG7 convention in Overland Park, KS, in July.



Invitation to join . . .

The Editor's Circle assists in placing the printed gospel into people's hands for their salvation and spiritual growth.

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- Do you ask God to use the magazine to bless others also?
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Or to donate by credit card, call 303-452-7973.

STATEMENT

Of the ownership, management, and circulation (required by the Act of Congress of August 12, 1970; Section 3685, Title 39, United States Code) of the BIBLE ADVOCATE, published ten times per year at Broomfield, Colorado for September 30, 2007.

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International Tour

The Philippines

The Church in the Philippines celebrated its fiftieth anniversary in April 2007 at the Opol Convention Center near Cagayan de Oro City, Mindanao Island. Up to 900 persons attended this event, using the theme "Building More Bridges for Success."

Pastor Baltazar Wooton, the Church's national president, reported 4,000 members and 84 congregations in thirteen districts, with 135 baptisms in 2006. In the wake of steady increase, the Church members believe they can keep growing.

Children and teenagers of the Philippine church participated in all facets of this conference, including athletic and other contests. The youth proved themselves ready and willing to serve, especially when it came time for worship.

Sponsored by Missions Abroad, Phil Kordahi of Australia represented the International Ministerial Congress at this golden jubilee event, giving workshops and the final sermon. He reports that construction of the new conference hall is nearing completion. Some of the districts have built bamboo huts on the same Church property to accommodate their brethren who attend conference meetings.

While in the Philippines, Elder



Kordahi also visited the church recently planted near Manila, on the Island of Luzon, where he was hosted by Pastor Mike Dizon. His time with the pastors and leaders was productive for the work of the gospel and brought these national groups in IMC Zone 6 closer together.

President Wooton's words to the Church during this fiftieth anniversary included these: "This is not the end of achieving great success in God's ministry but the beginning of what we envision for the future. May I inspire all brethren to make yourselves more useful and productive in

God's work, with strong faith as the only weapon to conquer all trials and hindrances of our spiritual lives."

Though not fully organized until 1957, the Philippine church traces back to about 1939 when a Filipino discovered the Church of God (Seventh Day) while visiting in California. Upon return to his homeland, he started a mission church that has developed to the current size and scope. The Philippine church is a charter member of the International Ministerial Congress.



Lamplighters

Among the things 2007 will be remembered for is the release of *Amazing Grace*, the compelling film about the life of William Wilberforce. This man dared take the British Empire to task over the African slave trade two centuries ago. "So enormous, so dreadful, so irremediable did the [slave] trade's wickedness appear that my own mind was completely made up for abolition. Let the consequences be what they would: I from this time determined that I would never rest until I had effected its abolition." Through his efforts, the Slave Trade Act was passed in 1807, and this paved the way for abolition of slavery in the British Empire by 1833.

The cause of the kingdom in every generation has advanced through the efforts of Christians who understand and embrace Scripture's cultural mandate to be salt and light in the world (Matthew 5:13-16). Some stand out more than others: Florence Nightingale, pioneer of modern nursing; Harriet Beecher Stowe, anti-slavery writer; Elizabeth Frye, prison reformer; Sojourner Truth, abolitionist and champion of women's rights; Harriet Tubman, an escaped slave who led hundreds to freedom; and William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army. Only Jesus can meet the deepest need of the human heart, but blessed are the movers and shakers whose bold and compassionate activism have furthered God's kingdom on earth.

By mid-twentieth century, American Christianity struggled between a narrow, inward fundamentalism and a newer evangelical faith that included social concerns and political activism. Carl F. H. Henry's book *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* sounded the alarm for Christians to engage culture. Then Francis Schaeffer enlightened the church on the broader implications of Supreme Court rulings like *Roe v. Wade* and helped Christians to become culturally relevant, not just doctrinally accurate.

Several evangelical leaders answered that call in

significant ways. Two of them, Jerry Falwell and D. James Kennedy, left this earthly life in 2007.

The controversial Falwell sometimes blundered and had many enemies.

Yet a *Christianity Today* article stated, "Falwell helped many recover a heritage in danger of being eclipsed" (July '07). Through his Thomas Road Baptist Church and Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia, Falwell lived true to his own words: ". . . I not only believe in prayer and preaching, I also believe in good citizenship. Americans must no longer linger in ignorance and apathy. We cannot be silent about the sins that are destroying this nation" (*Christianity Today*, July 2007).

Few understood the cultural mandate better than D. James Kennedy, pastor of Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church and founder of the multi-faceted Coral Ridge Ministries in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. And few lived out that mandate more effectively. As an intellectual, he engaged a different segment of the culture: those who opposed Christianity based on history, science, evolution, and other fields. Of all the words that could describe his life and calling, Kennedy chose *lamplighter*.

The cultural mandate calls Christians to light candles, not curse the darkness. "For the darkness shall turn to dawning/And the dawning to noonday bright,/And Christ's great kingdom shall come on earth,/The kingdom of love and light."*

As these lamplighters exit this life and others advance in age, three questions should haunt us: Who will take their place? Will you be among the next generation of lamplighters? Even now, is your light shining to brighten the corner where you are?

— Whaid Guscott Rose

* "We've a Story to Tell to the Nations"



National Hispanic Women's Retreat



For twenty years, our Hispanic sisters have proclaimed their faith and friendship in retreats. Here are three of the 213 women who recently met in El Paso, Texas, celebrating traditional Mexican dress and folkloric dance. Future retreats are planned in Texas, California, Washington D.C., and Colorado. Thanks to the many who work hard for these events that have come to mean so much to Hispanic women, for God's glory.



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